

when concentrated under the direction of a single section leader.

When the tactical situation calls for the AT section to be used in its primary function, the three machineguns would have no trouble finding useful employment in other hands; for example, they could be allocated to the platoons or given to the company headquarters and trains.

The only real drawbacks to this proposal would be the requirement for the soldiers of the AT section to train on another system, in addition to their

Dragon or Javelin and their personal weapons. But I believe these difficulties would be minor when compared to the company's gains in firepower and command and control.

Finally, with a weapons platoon, the company would have a single platoon chain-of-command responsible for planning and scheduling training; the executive officer or company commander would no longer have to plan training for each section separately.

We have been floundering around with this problem for too long. We need

to give our light infantry companies a better chance to employ their organic weapons, and there's an easy fix that is also inexpensive in both personnel and equipment resources: We need to bring back the company weapons platoon.

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# Eight Steps To Creating Quality Presentation Slides

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Any soldier who has been around a company or battalion headquarters for more than a few days knows that a briefing or training class using butcher paper with felt-tip pens just won't do any more. These are the days of computers, and we are expected to know our way around a computer. It is therefore in our best interest to know how to create quality presentation slides.

While it is true that gaudy presentation slides can detract from the information being presented, it is equally true that poorly designed slides will lose you your audience. Fortunately, there is a middle ground, and that is what I hope to present here.

A tasteful and creative presentation can take some work but generally no more work than the old butcher paper and felt-tips. The payoff is that you get your message across more effectively, your audience will retain more of the message, and they just might enjoy it enough to pay attention.

There are eight basic steps to creating quality presentation slides:

**Step One: Define your subject.** This is usually the easiest part of the process for most of us, because it is usually tasked. For example, the commander may say, "Give me a briefing on your company's performance in the most recent ARTEP." The key here is to limit your presentation to the subject and not get side-tracked onto other issues.

**Step Two: Define your audience.** Before creating slides, it is important to consider who it is you will be talking to. Is the audience an individual or a group? Is it the commanding general or a group of privates? What is the knowledge base of the audience on this subject? What will be the setting of the briefing, deskside or auditorium?

If you're giving instruction to a large group of soldiers, tailor the information to the soldier with the least knowledge on the subject, and risk boring the more advanced soldier. If the briefing is to the

general and his staff, tailor it to him, regardless of the knowledge base of the staff.

The size and location of the audience will determine the medium used for your slides. If it will be a deskside briefing, consider using a small flip chart or a computer screen presentation. If you're briefing a large group, consider either overhead projection (view graphs) or 35mm film projection.

**Step Three: Organize your information.** Sit down and write an outline of what you are going to say. If you're a subject-matter expert and will be speaking off the top of your head, at least write out the salient points. Create bullet statements of points you want the audience to remember.

**Step Four: Enter your text.** Type out the information. Put it in bullet format, keeping it short—six to eight words per bullet, six to eight bullets per slide. Anything more than that is too hard to read. Remember that you are not put-



ting your entire presentation on slides, just the important points. The slides are not the presentation; they are just an aid to it. If you're putting out a lot of information that the audience needs to remember, hand out a printed supplement.

Don't print everything in capital letters. All caps is the written equivalent of shouting, and studies have shown that it is much harder for your audience to read. Save caps, bold text, italics, and underlining for points of emphasis. Use no more than one or two different type faces throughout the presentation.

Be consistent in the size of the type from one slide to another, especially the titles. A small variation in the size of type in the body of the slide is okay. Type needs to be large enough for the person in the back of the auditorium to read. Generally, if you can read the type easily at arm's length, it will be okay. If you stick to six to eight words per bullet, this should be no problem.

Keep the titles to one line. Subtitles should be two lines at most, but still six to eight words.

**Step Five: Edit text content of the slide.** Take the time to make sure that the slides say what you want them to say, that they aid the presentation, and that they don't say more than *you* are going to say. Keep it short and simple. Think bullets, not sentences.

As often as not, most of us are not creating our presentation alone and, most likely, we are creating it for someone else. I often help create slides that will be presented by my commander at post or major command level. This means it must be staffed through the S-1, S-3, S-4, XO, and the like. After creating the initial draft, you can save yourself a lot of trouble by staffing it through everyone. If at all possible, send only one copy so that each successive staff section sees the proposed changes that the others have made. Always ensure that the final approving authority sees it last.

If there is a large number of slides, print each draft slide with the file name and a date/time group at the bottom. This will save time when you have to edit them. If possible, save the older ver-

sions of slides as they are edited. (How many times have you made a change, only to have the boss decide that he liked it better the other way?) Give successive versions file names with the addition of -a, -b, -c.

**Step Six: Enter your graphics.** Do your initial draft in black and white without any graphics or charts. Wait until you've finalized the contents of the slide bullets before dressing it up with graphics and charts. Make sure that any graphic or chart added to a slide adds to the presentation's content, or clarifies a difficult point, and is not merely a distraction. But don't be afraid to throw in an occasional attention-getting slide—mostly graphics—to wake up your audience.

**Step Seven: Edit, refine, organize, and polish your charts.** Use "builds." Builds are a series of slides in which each slide adds one new bullet to the previous one. This focuses the viewers' attention on the point at hand and keeps them from going on to the next point before you do.

If you have access to color output (plotter or printer), use colored text to emphasize a point, but don't get carried away with it. It will only confuse and distract the audience. If you use color, use cool colors (blue, green) for the background and hot colors (yellow, red, orange) for the text. For most presentations, keep the same color scheme throughout, but consider reversing the colors to emphasize a certain slide's importance.

**Step Eight: Print your finished presentation, speaker's notes, and handouts.** Finally, print your slides. While you're at it, print a smaller version of each slide on a piece of paper with your notes for that slide. This will keep your presentation on track, and keep you from having to look constantly from your audience to your slide and back. You, not the slide, should be presenting the information.

If you're presenting a lot of information, give out supplemental handouts, or copies of the slides. But remember to hand them out after the presentation so that the audience is not distracted by them during the presentation. If you're

giving the presentation to a small group, you might consider making copies of your slides, notes, and supplemental information on diskettes to give to members of the audience. This allows them to review the information at their leisure and can be less expensive than making a high volume of paper copies.

What kind of software and hardware do you need? Most units in the Army today have at least an old IBM XT computer and Harvard Graphics version 2.3, and perfectly acceptable presentation slides can be created on this type of system. Of course, it's much better if you have access to a faster computer using one of the newer presentation software packages (Harvard Graphics, PowerPoint, Freelance, Corel Draw 3.0). These new packages make the process relatively painless, and most of them now have automated advice, displayed as you create a slide, on how to make better slides.

Finally, the key to quality slides is the quality of the output device. It is possible to make decent slides by printing your slide on a dot-matrix printer, making a copy of it on a copying machine, then heat transferring it onto transparency material. Sometimes, however, slides made by this method don't lie flat on the overhead projector, and the text is hard to read. You will get much better results by buying transparency material that will go through your copying machine so that you can copy directly onto it. Better yet, have a laser printer that prints directly to the transparency material.

Whatever kind of equipment you have for making slides, the important thing is that they be legible and that they support your presentation. A properly prepared and presented briefing will ensure that you communicate what you want to say the first time, every time.

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